

Responding to Mobility Challenges Following the Northridge Earthquake

Dean R. Dunphy, Secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, State of California



The Emergency Transportation task force was created to respond to the Northridge earthquake. Mr. Dunphy played a videotape which documented the earthquake damage and the reconstruction effort. The videotape included the following points.

- At 4:30 A.M., on January 17, 1994, a major earthquake hit Southern California. An emergency transportation task force was established later that day for the sole purpose of getting the Los Angeles freeway system back in operation.
- Segments of major freeways in the Los Angeles area suffered major damage. Damaged facilities included the section of the I-10 on Santa Monica Freeway just west of downtown, the raised interchange of I-5 and Route 14 in the San Fernando Valley, a section of I-14 just north of the Route 5 and Route 14 interchange, and Route 118 in the San Fernando Valley.
- Sixty people died in the earthquake, and thousands more were injured. Damage to buildings, roads, and other facilities was estimated in the billions of dollars. Further, it was expected that the city would not be back to normal for two years.
- Minutes after the earthquake, Caltrans went to work setting up detours and getting the demolition crews out to the sites. By 11:00 A.M., demolition contractors were already working. Crews worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to help get the freeways back to normal conditions.
- After 84 days and \$30 million, the Santa Monica Freeway was restored to normal working conditions. Although standards were maintained, the quick response can be attributed to cutting red tape and to incentives for early completion. It took four months to get I-5 back in operation. Repairs to all the freeways should be completed by the end of 1994.
- Immediately after the earthquake, traffic congestion in major travel corridors was terrible. The media and other sources provided strong encouragement to the public to take public transit or carpool to help alleviate congestion. Commuters responded in a positive manner. For example, ridership increased by some 95 to 100 percent on one bus route. New Metrorail stations were developed to help meet the demand on rail service. Special HOV detours were developed. These provided significant travel savings of 15 to 20 minutes and encouraged HOV use.
- Other actions were also taken. For example, some two-way streets were converted into one way facilities, trucking companies were asked to stagger their delivery hours, and temporary roadways were built where freeway sections had collapsed.
- In summary, I think the video provides an excellent overview of the quick response by Caltrans and other agencies to the Northridge earthquake. The quick, coordinated reaction to this disaster is just another example of the good working relationship that exists among transportation agencies in the Los Angeles area. Thank you.